

Working for Gender Equality

The Commonwealth has made many contributions to bringing about improvements in the current international political, economic and social climate, including its strong stand on gender issues and support of the United Nations gender equality goals.

– Angela King, (then) United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, March 2003, New York.

The Commonwealth Secretariat recognises that gender equality cannot be divorced from mainstream political and socio-economic issues and other priority development agendas. At the national level, National Women's Machineryes (NWMs) take a leading role in ensuring that their governments recognise the importance of integrating gender equality concerns into relevant sectors. Similarly, the Secretariat takes the lead in ensuring that gender issues are integrated into the agenda of meetings of Commonwealth education, finance, health, law and youth ministers.

Guided by the 1987 Commonwealth Plan of Action (PoA), the Secretariat's first Women and Development Programme provided advisory services to governments and programmes that looked at women's status in a number of areas. On the whole, however, the Women in Development approach promoted failed to address systemic causes of gender inequality. It viewed women as passive recipients of development assistance, rather than as active agents in transforming their own economic, political, social and cultural realities.

After 1995, the Secretariat's work was guided by the second Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development. This was the Commonwealth's contribution to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, and was thus consistent with the Beijing Platform for Action (BPIA) goals and strategies while also building on the comparative advantages¹ of the Commonwealth. The 1995 PoA marked a shift from a concentration on special projects for women to mainstreaming gender issues into the whole spectrum of Commonwealth development policies and programmes, and also from 'equality of opportunities' to 'equality and equity of outcomes'.

In 2000, the PoA priorities were reviewed and updated by Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers. The PoA Update (2000–2005) responded to

persistent challenges and emerging gender equality issues, such as poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and concentrated efforts and resources for greater effectiveness and impact. Progress reports in 1997, 1999, 2001 and 2003² relating to the implementation of the PoA have confirmed significant progress in some areas while recognising the urgent need to 'deepen action and refocus strategies to meet urgent development priorities and emerging challenges.'

Consultations in 2003 and 2004 in the wings of the annual meetings of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York allowed Commonwealth ministers and heads of NWMs to agree on priorities and needs, emerging challenges and strategies required.

The refocusing of direction, partnerships and strategies is reflected in the new PoA for Gender Equality 2005–2015 that was approved by Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs at their seventh meeting held in Fiji Islands from 30 May–2 June 2004. This new PoA will guide Commonwealth action for the next 10 years. Internally, the Secretariat, guided by the 2003 Aso Rock Commonwealth Declaration³, seeks to deepen the gender equality outcomes within the 16 development and democracy programme areas of its four-year Strategic Plans.

A Strategy for Gender Equality

The Commonwealth Secretariat gender equality strategy operates at three levels:

- **National** – providing policy advice, support for capacity-building, information and other support to member governments, civil society organisations and other partners through a special gender equality programme, as well as through the technical assistance activities of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC);
- **Regional/International** – focusing on

advocacy, consensus-building, networking, partnerships with key regional and international bodies and development agencies;

- **Institutional** – supporting the development of capacity for gender mainstreaming systems and strategies within institutions.

National Interventions: Maximising Gender Impacts

The Secretariat's work is based on its areas of comparative advantage and its programmes are based on its advocacy, brokering and catalytic roles. Its gender mainstreaming activities are executed under the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) and Commonwealth Secretariat budgets. Partnerships add benefits, providing technical expertise, additional funds and in-kind contributions. The Gender Section has moved from being part of a division responsible for gender and youth affairs, to join the education and health sections in 2002 to form the Social Transformation Programmes Division (STPD). Together, they provide a human-centred approach to development. The division reports to the Gender Steering Committee which is chaired by the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

The division has a three-pronged role which is central to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It has lead responsibility for the programme to mainstream gender equality in the policies and activities of member countries; lead responsibility for monitoring gender mainstreaming in the Secretariat; and responsibility for the Secretariat's education and health programmes.

Gender equality, the development challenges posed by HIV/AIDS, poverty eradication and the economic empowerment of women, and the impact of conflict are common themes in the work of the three sections in STPD. The three sections assist member countries with policy advice, strategy development,

tools and methodologies, training, strengthening institutional capacity and implementation.

The following illustrate some of the gender mainstreaming activities undertaken by the Secretariat to support national and regional initiatives:

Consensus-building, Advocacy and Information Dissemination

Consultations, sharing of experiences and consensus-building lie at the heart of the Commonwealth's work and form an integral part of the Commonwealth's approach to advancing gender equality. The Commonwealth spearheads important initiatives placing gender on global, regional and national agendas. It promotes the principle that gender equality is an issue of democracy, good governance and people-centred development through the following:

- Consensus-building and advocacy programmes to promote a Commonwealth voice on gender and development issues at regional/global-agenda setting fora (e.g. at meetings of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs; key regional bodies; the UN CSW; and global conferences such as the Monterrey Summit on Financing for Development and the Johannesburg Summit of Sustainable Development);
- Policy advice to governments and partners through a help-desk and the dissemination of country experiences and good practice;
- The dissemination of information through a Knowledge-based Network and a Commonwealth gender website (www.thecommonwealth.org/gender) which contains an extensive gender knowledge database and records over 8 million hits a year.

Supporting National Women's Machineries

The Gender Section has facilitated the work of NWMs through:

- The development of the Gender Management System (GMS) (*see Box 2.1, page 17*);
- Contributing to the shaping of gender-



aware development policies, plans and programmes at national and regional levels;

- Developing innovative publications, resource materials, tools and methodologies for use at the institutional, national, regional and international levels on gender mainstreaming; gender, democracy, peace and conflict; gender and human rights; gender-based violence; gender-responsive budgets; gender, enterprise and trade; and gender and HIV/AIDS;
- Organising pan-Commonwealth, regional and national workshops, symposia and colloquia on the above areas, bringing together NWMs with other constituencies such as parliamentarians, magistrates and judges, local councillors, finance and trade ministries, HIV/AIDS national commissions, women's NGOs, tertiary institutions, the media, etc.;
- Facilitating partnerships between women, men and young people from a wide range of organisations, to contribute to conflict resolution, peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction in countries in conflict;
- Promoting the Commonwealth's 30% target of women in parliament and local government;
- Building partnerships with Commonwealth, international and regional agencies to better deliver programmes and facilitating the sharing of good practice on gender equality;
- Monitoring, assessing and reporting on the impacts of activities undertaken within the framework of the PoA across the Commonwealth.

Gender, Democracy, Peace and Conflict

Strengthening participatory democracy is one of the key Commonwealth goals. The

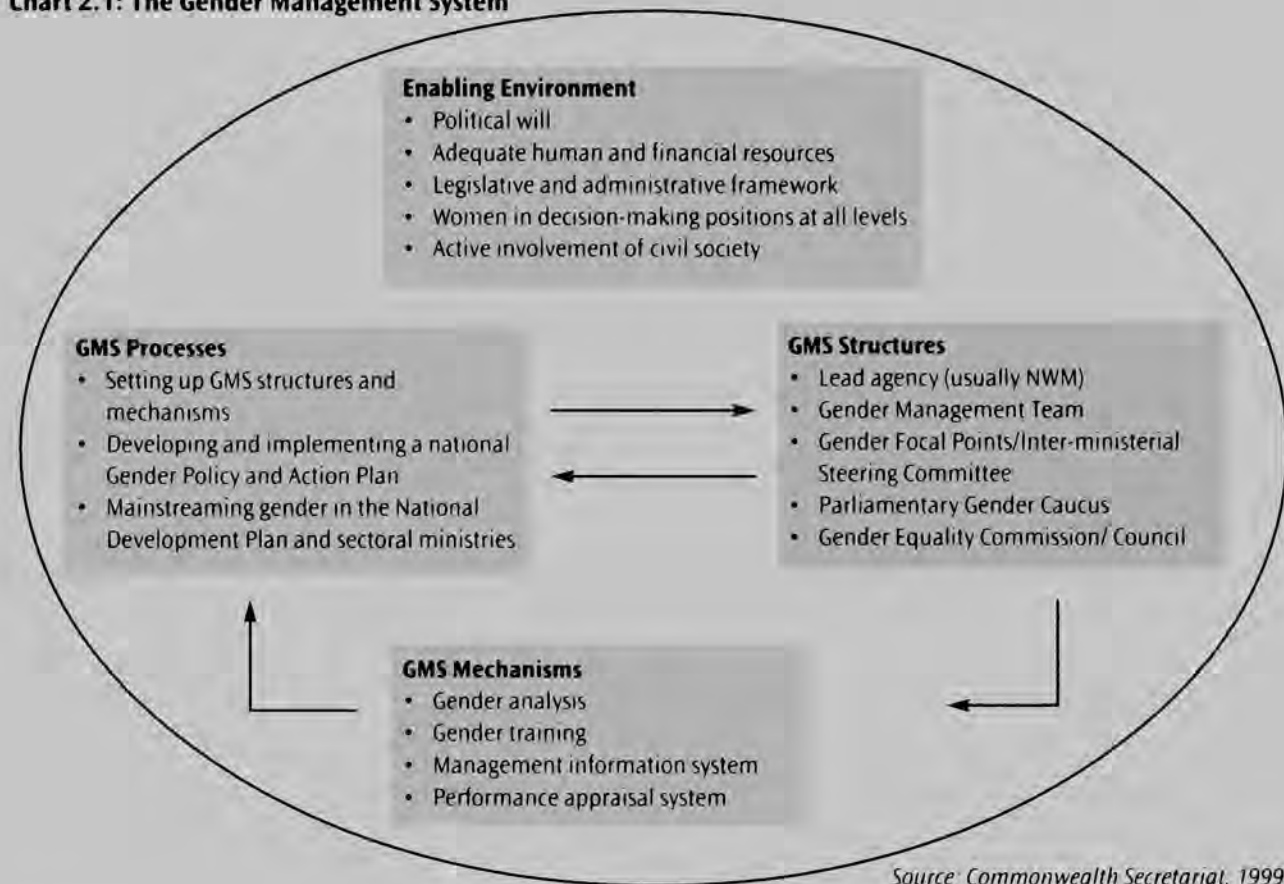
Box 2.1: The Gender Management System

The Gender Management System (GMS) is a Commonwealth framework for gender mainstreaming. It is a network of structures, processes and mechanisms set up within an institution, sector, cross-cutting development issue or country to facilitate the advancement of gender-aware policies, plans and programmes at all levels.

The GMS was developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat in consultation with member governments and other key stakeholders to strengthen the capacities of NWMs, the public sector and the Secretariat itself.

The GMS is a useful tool for NWMs as national bodies with responsibility to implement national gender policies and action plans. NWMs need to understand the links between gender issues and key development objectives; advocate for the shared responsibility for gender equality outcomes and allocation of resources with mainstream sectors and institutions; build capacity for gender planning to bring about broad policy and programme changes; and undertake gender audits to monitor and assess impacts.

Chart 2.1: The Gender Management System



The flexibility and usefulness of the GMS as a framework for advancing gender equality allows it to be adapted to the needs and priorities of countries, sectors and institutions. It facilitates partnerships with other stakeholders and lays the foundation for co-ordination, collaboration and co-operation.

The Secretariat has provided technical assistance to member countries on gender mainstreaming and establishing a GMS. St Kitts and Nevis was the first member country to pilot the GMS in 1999.

A set of resource manuals has been published to assist governments and other stakeholders in undertaking gender-aware analysis, policy making, planning and programme implementation. These include sector-wide publications such as *Gender Management Systems Handbook*, *Using Gender-Sensitive Indicators*, *Gender Mainstreaming in Development Planning* and *Gender Mainstreaming in the Public Service*.

There are, in addition, sector-specific manuals on finance, agriculture and rural development, legal and constitutional affairs, trade industry, and information and communications.

The Secretariat has also published a new GMS series on such strategic development issues as poverty eradication and the Millennium Development Goals, multilateral trade, HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence and human rights (see Annex X).

The GMS Toolkit (2004) uses distance education principles to bring together the series of manuals and includes a Trainer's Guide, an Action Guide (for individual learners), a Change Management Briefing (to facilitate institutional change), and a CD-ROM which includes the Toolkit and the entire GMS series of publications.

Secretary-General's Good Offices role supports capacity-building initiatives to prevent and resolve conflicts and ensure increased women's participation and representation in peace processes. In their Aso Rock Declaration in 2003, Commonwealth Heads of Government reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen democracy and development through partnerships for peace and prosperity. Thus, women's full participation in democracy, peace and conflict resolution processes is highlighted as crucial for the achievement of gender equality and sustainable development.

In 2000, the Sixth Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs (6WAMM)⁴ recommended that the Commonwealth take action, in collaboration with other international organisations and civil society, to include women at all levels of peace-building, peacekeeping, conflict prevention, reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction policies, programmes and decision-making. The Ministers adopted a 30% target for women's participation in these processes. More recently in Fiji Islands in 2004, the Ministers urged countries which have already reached the 30% target to strive for parity in representation.

As part of its efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, the Secretariat continues to provide technical assistance and training to member countries in areas such as election monitoring and observation.

More women are entering politics and standing for election



The Gender Section works with the Secretariat's Democracy Section to engender the electoral processes through reviews of national Constitutions, election manuals, and training workshops for parliamentarians. In December 2003, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), a workshop entitled 'Engendering Development and Democracy' was organised for parliamentarians in the wings of the CHOGM in Abuja, Nigeria.

The Secretary-General has also appointed Special Envoys, several of them women, to member countries to assist in the democratic, conflict prevention and resolution processes.

Four regional symposia on gender, politics, peace and conflict were organised for the Africa, Asia/Europe, Caribbean and Pacific regions.

The Secretariat conducted a fact-finding mission to northern Uganda to assess the impact of armed conflict on men, women and young persons and explore ways to improve livelihoods. In 2001, the Secretariat and a number of national and international partners convened a national consultation on 'Women and Men in Partnership for Post-conflict Reconstruction in Sierra Leone'. This was followed in 2002 by a workshop on 'Women in Parliament in Sierra Leone' which brought women parliamentarians from other countries to build leadership capacity among and support for prospective women candidates in the May 2002 elections. Among other outcomes,

these initiatives resulted in an increase from 8% to 15% of women in the parliament of Sierra Leone.

In promoting gender equality and democracy through peace and conflict activities, member countries continue to face many challenges, such as inadequacy of resources, lack of political will, lack of sex-disaggregated data, weak NWMs and low levels of civil society participation. Significant progress has been made, but much work remains to be done. The challenge is to review lessons learned, share ideas and exchange information, and lobby governments to exercise the necessary political will to mainstream a gender perspective into policies, plans and programmes at all levels.

Gender, Human Rights and Law

The Secretariat promotes the protection of the human rights of women and the girl-child, the elimination of gender-based violence, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. It advocates ratification and implementation of Conventions that protect the rights of women such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Regional strategies, in partnership with multilateral and regional bodies, have been adopted by the Secretariat to support countries' efforts to institutionalise the Commonwealth's integrated approach to eradicate gender-based violence. Resource and training materials on an integrated approach to gender-based violence have been developed.

A Commonwealth Expert Group has looked at ways of combating the unlawful trafficking of women and children. Trafficking in persons, especially in women and children, for commercial sexual exploitation is one of the fastest growing areas of international criminal activity and of increasing concern to the international community. Trafficking for the purposes of labour exploitation, forced labour, marriage, adoption, and

the trade in organs are additional areas of concern, but are less well documented. Six country studies on the commercial sexual exploitation of children have been undertaken in India, Jamaica, Kenya, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Gender, Poverty Eradication and Economic Empowerment

The Commonwealth has adopted a multi-pronged approach to poverty eradication and economic empowerment for women. At the macro-economic level, it has contributed to the international advocacy on mainstreaming gender perspectives in fiscal and trade policy.

Gender-responsive Budgets (GRBs), (see Box 2.2, this page) have been a priority focus area and the Secretariat has been recognised for its instrumental role in the development and production of tools, methodologies and capacity-building materials.

The Secretariat has also played a key role in disseminating knowledge on GRBs through a series of publications and has similarly contributed to the international debates on poverty eradication.

Future areas identified for development on GRBs include revenue analysis and expanding the methodology for monitoring of the MDGs.

Trade is another strategic area of intervention. In collaboration with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the Secretariat organised a symposium for Trade Officials in Suva, Fiji Islands in February 2003. Participants discussed how to maximise trading opportunities for women and minimise the negative impacts of multilateral trade on women, and build capacity of member governments in the areas of gender and multilateral trade – an integral part of the process of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

In addition, the Commonwealth Secretariat's Debt-Recording and Management System (CS-DRMS) programme has reviewed the need for sex-disaggregated data and gender practices with a view to examining the differential impact of debt programmes on women and men (see Box 2.3, page 20).

Box 2.2: Gender-responsive Budgeting

Gender-responsive Budget (GRB) initiatives provide a mechanism by which governments and civil society agencies can integrate gender analysis into public expenditure, and increasingly revenue, policies and budgets. The idea of GRBs developed out of a growing understanding that macroeconomic policy can contribute to narrowing or widening gender gaps in areas such as education, health, incomes and nutrition, and make the living standards of different groups of women better or worse.

The Commonwealth Secretariat was the first intergovernmental organisation to promote Gender-responsive Budgeting (GRB). It launched the Gender Budget Initiative in 1995 and has since played a pioneering role in the production of tools, methodologies and capacity-building materials for the implementation of gender budgets.

The Secretariat has promoted and disseminated these concepts and tools internationally through a wide variety of publications – including case studies and a practitioner's guide. Some of the more recent publications are:

- *Gender Budgets Make Cents* (2001)
- *Gender Budgets Make More Cents* (2002)
- *Engendering Budgets: A Practitioner's Guide* (2003)

Until recently, the focus of most of the work was on the expenditure side of budgets. The Secretariat, however, has pioneered new work on the revenue side. In 2003, it brought out a publication on *Gender Impacts of Government Revenue Collection: The Case of Taxation* which put forward a conceptual framework; it is proposed to develop this further through the development of tools and some in-country pilots.

In addition, the Secretariat has been responsible for policy work and capacity-building in support of GRBs through providing technical assistance in several countries, such as Barbados, Belize, South Africa and Sri Lanka for pilot work. To a large extent, it is the Commonwealth experience – primarily in Australia and South Africa – which has been adapted as the framework for developing GRB in over 50 countries globally.

In 2004, the Gender Section of the Secretariat commissioned regional reports on the progress of GRBs within the Commonwealth. The reports were compiled and presented with a synthesis report as *Gender-responsive Budgeting in the Commonwealth: Progress and Challenges* at the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting in September 2004. This was a preliminary report which will form the basis for assessing progress at the 2005 Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting, where a final report will be presented based on comments and updates received from member countries.

A manual, *Gender and Debt Management*, was published in 2005.

The Secretariat's Gender Equality Programme seeks to assist the empowerment of women by eliminating discrimination, promoting equal opportunities for women, and recognising that gender equality is essential to poverty eradication and sustainable development. The 2003 publication, *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals: A Handbook for Policy-Makers and Other Stakeholders* illustrates that most MDGs can only be achieved by addressing, among other things, women's disproportionate burden of poverty, lack of access to education and health services, natural resources including land, lack of productive opportunities and control over their livelihoods.

The Secretariat supports the Commonwealth Business Women's Network (CBWN), a strategic arm of the Commonwealth Business Council, in its efforts to promote women's access to markets and other opportunities (see Box 2.4, page 27). The Secretariat, in collaboration with the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex and the network, Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising (WIEGO), has supported the development of case studies on Global Value Chain (GVC) Analysis on the status of women in the informal economy.

The Secretariat has two publications on the above subject, *Mainstreaming Informal Employment and Gender in Poverty Reduction and Chains of Fortune: Linking Women Producers and Workers with Local Markets*.

Box 2.3: Debt Management and Gender Equality

The link between national debt, repayment schedules and gender equality is not widely understood. Officials handling national debt are often not aware of the impact of debt on gender equality; those working on gender issues are generally not conversant with the intricacies of debt management. Thus borrowings are often made for projects where gender impacts have not been taken into account; and repayments are made from financial allocations – most often taken from health, education and other sectors, which have an adverse impact on women.

For nearly two decades, the Commonwealth Secretariat's package of advisory services in debt and development resource management¹ has been useful to over 50 countries. Successful as this programme has been, the gender dimension within debt management has, until recently, been largely ignored. Now, the Secretariat's lead division in this area, the Special Advisory Services Division (SASD), is taking measures to engender the debt management programme. In doing so, it seeks to sensitise governments on the need to take on board gender issues in their own debt management operations.

The new publication, *Gender Integration in Debt and Development Resource Management*, seeks to sensitise both debt and gender practitioners on the link between debt management and gender equality. In addition to reviewing the policies and actions taken by the main international development agencies and bilateral donors to promote and integrate gender issues in the provision of development assistance, the report suggests effective and practical ways through which developing country governments can integrate gender equality considerations into their debt and development resource management.

The core findings of the publication are already being disseminated to officers working in debt management units in member countries. More than 300 officers from Commonwealth ministries of finance and central banks, who attended regional debt management workshops in 2002/03, were sensitised to the need to take into account gender needs at all stages of the borrowing process. The framework for gender integration that the publication proposes will be pilot-tested in a number of countries.

¹ Known as the Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Recording and Management System (CS-DRMS 2000+). In use since 1985, the CS-DRMS software allows countries to manage different types of national debt flows in an integrated manner and is a valuable tool for both policy-making and improving transparency in economic management.

Gender and Education

Following the 15th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Edinburgh, UK, in October 2003, the Secretariat has been working with Education Ministries and civil society organisations in six key areas which are important for the social and economic empowerment of girls and women: universal primary education; gender disparities in education; improving quality in education; using distance learning to overcome geographical barriers; supporting education in difficult circumstances; and mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS on education systems.

The ADEA (Association for the Development of Education in Africa) Working Group on Non-Formal Education was set up in response to the Education for All challenge. ADEA is co-ordinated by the Commonwealth Secretariat which is an active partner in educational

development in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In June and September 2004, the Secretariat, in partnership with UNICEF, the Forum for African Women Educationalists and the Commonwealth Youth Programme, convened meetings in Nairobi, Kenya, and Chandigarh, India, to share and review good practice in girls' education in the two regions.

Drawing on this information, the Secretariat's Education Section is preparing a publication on gender mainstreaming in education.

Gender and Health

The Secretariat also seeks to include gender perspectives in its main programme areas in health: combating HIV/AIDS, maternal health, infant health and managing the migration of human resources in the health sector.

It advocates the participation of men and young people in HIV/AIDS prevention

Gender and HIV/AIDS

The Secretariat has adopted a multi-sectoral approach to assist member countries to combat HIV/AIDS. An important element is the mainstreaming of gender analysis in addressing the pandemic, including areas of prevention, treatment and care. The merging of the education, gender and health sections into STPD has also brought potential synergy between the activities in areas of policy, advocacy and awareness-raising, and capacity-building.

The urgency of this programme is underlined by the fact that the number of people living with AIDS globally stands at 40 million (UNAIDS/WHO, 2004, Estimates) and that 60% of all infected people are in the Commonwealth, with nine of the most heavily affected countries being member states. Nearly 50% of all people living with AIDS are women and the infection rate among young women is outstripping that for men of similar age.

The Secretariat seeks to contribute to raising awareness about gender and HIV/AIDS, working with member countries and international agencies (e.g. UNAIDS and UNIFEM) on strategies for assisting national AIDS plans and National AIDS Commissions to be more gender-sensitive so that the issues of gender and HIV/AIDS can be better understood and addressed in future programmes.

Work has been undertaken with individual governments in Africa (e.g. Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia) and through the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other regional organisations. The Secretariat published a training manual on gender mainstreaming in HIV/AIDS in 2002.

In June 2004, the Secretariat collaborated with the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health and launched the virtual International Institute on Gender and HIV/AIDS in Johannesburg, South Africa (see Box 2.5, page 22). In June 2004, it established with the University of the West Indies and UNESCO an academic chair on HIV education at the university.

programmes, and works with countries to develop multi-sectoral strategies for the reduction of maternal and infant mortality rates. The Secretariat also assists countries to develop strategies and systems to manage the migration of professionals from the health sector, and implement the Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health Workers.

Regional/ International Partnerships

The Secretariat has built a number of coalitions with Commonwealth associations and civil society partners, regional development bodies and multilateral agencies, including UN agencies, and individual governments and their development agencies. Commonwealth partnerships include the Commonwealth Foundation's work with CSOs, professional and other organisations, the Commonwealth of Learning with its innovative approaches to distance education, CPA, Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association and the CBWN.

The Secretariat has encouraged collaboration with NGOs, wider civil society partners and the private sector to add value to the work of NWMs in areas such as advocacy, legislative reform, training and capacity building, economic empowerment and credit initiatives, and programmes with marginalised communities. This has sprung from the recognition that civil society acts as a critical voice in ensuring that resources, wealth and power are equitably distributed between women and men, within communities, and across social groups and regions.

As part of preparations for the 7th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers' Meeting (7WAMM) held in Fiji Islands in 2004, a Commonwealth Gender Reference Group – a representative body of key policy-makers, practitioners and experts from all regions – was established in March 2003. At the 7WAMM itself, civil society representatives for the first time were able to participate actively in the

Box 2.4: The Commonwealth Business Women's Network

The Commonwealth Business Women's Network (CBWN) is a division of the Commonwealth Business Council (CBC). Originally conceived in the Gender Section of the Commonwealth Secretariat, responsibility for it was transferred to the CBC in 2002; it was formally launched in 2003.

The CBWN works with businesses and governments to support gender mainstreaming activities. Its mandate includes empowering businesswomen through raising awareness of how global and local trade and trade agreements impact on them; creating knowledge networks for Small, Medium and Micro-Enterprises (SMMEs); disseminating gender equality best practices amongst stakeholders; and providing global outreach and networking opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

In carrying out this mandate, the CBWN creates linkages between the private sector and governments, and works with partners to set up 'knowledge networks' which provide support and advice on funding, sustainability and growth for women entrepreneurs.

Since its launch, the CBWN has taken the lead in creating fora for stakeholders to promote gender equality within the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) – a key developmental initiative in Africa. It has also been a leader in advocating a specific agenda for women within all developmental initiatives, especially the role of 'Women in SMMEs' in Africa, where women are the key drivers of growth in the formal and the informal economy.

The CBWN has attracted private sector support and contributes to important policy platforms such as the Commonwealth Business Forum, which feeds into CHOGM discussions and Commonwealth ministerial meetings such as that of Ministers Responsible for Women.

At the 2003 Forum, held parallel to CHOGM in Abuja, Nigeria, the CBWN conference fed into a session on 'The Role of Women Entrepreneurs in Sustainable Development'. In May/June 2004, a CBWN Roundtable on 'The Role of Women Entrepreneurs in Poverty Alleviation: Multi-stakeholder Partnerships' was held during the Partners Forum of the 7th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting and a summary of the Roundtable discussions and recommendations fed into the ministerial discussions.

The CBWN has initiated groundbreaking work on creating awareness about how multilateral trade agreements affect women entrepreneurs. In partnership with Geneva Women in International Trade, CBWN organised a session on 'Gender and Trade' at the World Trade Organisation Public Symposium in May 2004 in Geneva. This was the first time such a session had been held. In November 2004, it organised a seminar on 'Promoting Women Entrepreneurs: Sharing Best Practice' in London.

The CBWN will continue to provide a platform for advocacy, discussion and capacity building about the WTO and Multilateral Trading Agreements with the support of its partners across the Commonwealth and the support and backing of trade expertise at the CBC.

Further information on the CBWN is available from: Ms Sudha Singh, Co-ordinator, Commonwealth Business Women's Network, 18 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5LU, UK. Tel: +44 (0)20 70244 8238 Fax: +44-(0)20-7930 3944 Email: sudha.singh@cbcglobelink.org Website: www.cbcglobelink.org

Young businesswomen at a CBWN meeting



development of the new PoA. This new consultative mechanism consists of representatives from civil society, governments and regional organisations. This Group's input will enable a more coherent focus on the specificities in countries/regions and enhanced implementation of the PoA.

Engaging as key partners the major regional economic communities, such as SADC and CARICOM, is seen as critical to the Secretariat's ability to maximise use of its efforts and scarce resources, and ensure sustainability and development impacts on the ground.

Institutionalising the Gender Equality Programme

The Commonwealth Secretary-General provides overall direction for the Secretariat's work on gender equality and reports regularly to Heads of Government, Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs and the Secretariat's governing bodies on progress in implementing the PoA. The Secretary-General also encourages governments to strive for gender balance in the composition of their countries' delegations to Commonwealth meetings and workshops; and requests them to encourage qualified women to apply for senior positions in the Commonwealth Secretariat.

At the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the Secretary-General committed the Secretariat to 'adopt nine Special Measures that cut across Secretariat activities to strengthen its capacity to provide gender-inclusive and women-specific functional and technical assistance to governments'.

Critical Institutional Changes

Shortly after the Beijing conference, the organisational structure and culture of the Secretariat were reviewed with the objective of transforming the Secretariat itself into an example of good practice. A Gender Steering Committee, made up of divisional Directors and chaired by the Secretary-General, was set up. It reports to the Management Committee which is also

Box 2.5: International Institute on Gender and HIV/AIDS

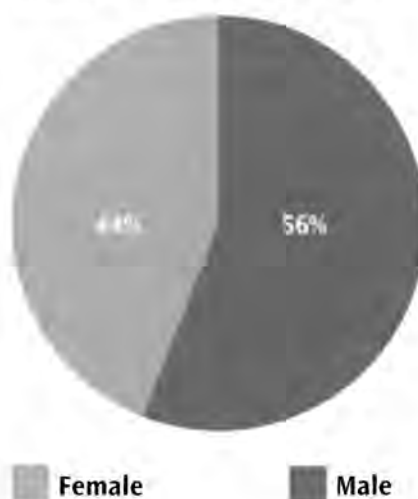
In response to the severity of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, many Commonwealth countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, have drawn up HIV/AIDS policies and are implementing programmes to mitigate its impact. The challenge, however, has been to ensure that these policies make the link between gender inequality and the spread of HIV/AIDS, address gender issues related to prevention, treatment and care, and that they are translated into effective gender-sensitive practices. It is also important that appropriate research informs the development of gender-sensitive policies and programmes so that successful interventions come from a strong evidence base.

With this in mind, an International Institute on Gender and HIV/AIDS was launched in Johannesburg, South Africa, in June 2004. It is a virtual Institute which brings together governments (policy makers, programme implementers), researchers (academics and research organisations), and civil society organisations (including youth organisations and people living with HIV/AIDS), to identify the critical gender issues, develop action plans for integrating gender issues into HIV/AIDS policies and programmes, and build collaborative partnerships.

The Institute was established by the Commonwealth Secretariat in collaboration with the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, Dalhousie University of Canada, the Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS Research Alliance and the AIDS and Rights Alliance of Southern Africa. It was launched in Southern Africa, one of the worst affected regions in terms of the pandemic. The main aim of the Institute is to strengthen and enhance gender-sensitive HIV/AIDS policies and programmes in the region.

The virtual Institute has been described as being 'without walls and without borders'. The Secretariat and its partners plan to introduce this virtual model to other regions of Africa, as well as the Caribbean, Asia and Pacific. It therefore contributes to a global network of expertise on gender and HIV/AIDS policy, practice and research.

Chart 2.2:
Commonwealth Secretariat –
Staff Numbers by Sex, July 2004



chaired by the Secretary-General. Two divisional Gender Focal Points (GFPs) were also identified in each Division to co-ordinate the mainstreaming of gender in programmes. 'Gender Resource Packs' were prepared for Directors and GFPs and regular consultations and reviews on the Secretariat's gender mainstreaming activities were carried out.

An Equal Employment Opportunities

Policy (EEOP) became effective from 11 June 1997. An EEOP Steering Group, constituted in April 1998, monitors its implementation and reports to the Management Committee. Counsellors provide a 'listening ear' to staff on how to address such concerns as sexual harassment and sex discrimination in the workplace.

The adoption of a 33% target for the recruitment of female experts and for posts within the organisation has resulted in an increase of women at professional levels. As of July 2003, 33% per cent of senior positions were filled by women. Women make up 40% of all middle professional staff (see Table 2.1 page 24). By July 2004, women constituted 44% of all staff, while support staff was overwhelmingly female at 82.7%. Female staff have increased since 1999.

In 1997/1998, workshops to raise awareness about gender issues were organised for all staff. By 2000, the Secretariat had completed extensive training for 288 staff members in gender analysis, planning, and evaluation skills. The project management manual and related training for staff included clear gender guidelines and indicators for projects. The Secretariat's gender training

Box 2.6: Public Sector Management and Leadership Development

Civil services in many developing countries are undergoing extensive reform in order that they may spearhead development efforts and play a leading role as modernisers. To be effective, public sector leaders must build effective coalitions and partnerships with non-state stakeholders, integrate different cultures, styles, sectors and disciplines, and build support teams. To assist them in this, the Commonwealth Secretariat provides support to member governments through a series of Public Sector Management in Leadership Development activities in which gender equality plays a prominent part.

A training programme on 'Men and Women in Public Sector Management: Developing Executive Leadership in the SADC Region', was held in Botswana in 2003 by the Secretariat's Governance and Institutional Development Division together with the University of Botswana's Centre of Specialisation in Public Administration and Management. It drew 30 participants from the region, including heads of civil services and public service commissions; permanent secretaries; and top officials from civil service reform and change management units, treasuries, ministries of finance, and planning and development; NWMs; and central personnel management officers of civil services.

Recommendations included the need for:

- Building capacity through skills enhancement to promote leadership roles for men and women to achieve better management performance in the public service;
- Promoting partnerships between men and women for effective leadership in executive positions;
- Creating awareness of support strategies for incorporating gender analysis in public policy-making and implementation;
- Contributing to the enhancement of women's participation in socio-political and economic decision-making processes;
- Developing executive management skills for gender-related advocacy and policy development;
- Promoting gender-responsive public expenditure and management through gender-sensitive budgets; and
- Contributing towards capacity enhancement for poverty eradication strategies and the achievement of relevant MDGs in the SADC region.

Similar workshops are being held in other regions of the Commonwealth.

programme has provided a foundation for gender mainstreaming. Impacts of the training at programme level are continuously assessed and adjusted as an integral part of the human resources strategy programme.

Employment terms in the Secretariat have also been upgraded to reflect gender considerations. Maternity leave for Secretariat staff has been increased to a period of 18 weeks' paid leave, and 10 working days' leave is now granted to a staff member whose spouse gives birth or who adopts a child.

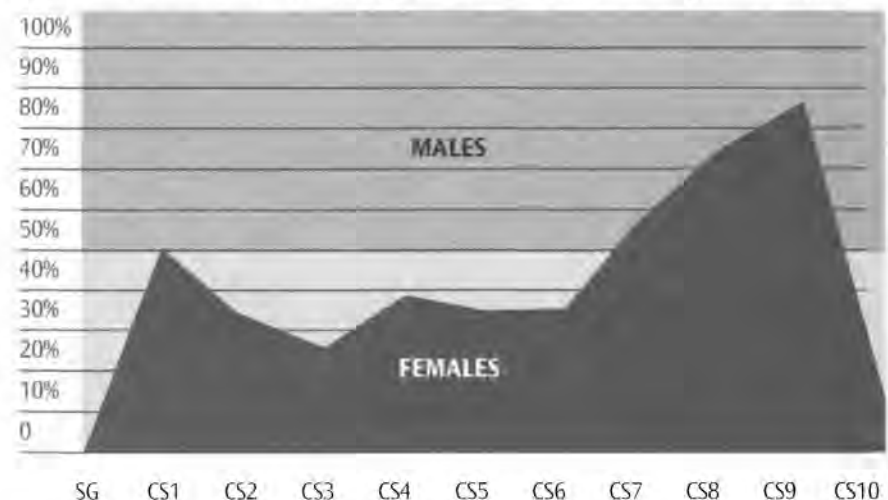
Technical assistance forms an important part of the development work of the Secretariat. However, proactive work needs to be done to ensure that suitably qualified female experts are recruited. The analysis by sex of the number of short-term experts recruited indicates that from 1997 to 2004, the total number of female experts was consistently around 50% less than male experts, except in 2001 when the number of female experts showed a slight increase. Out of a total of 312 contracts issued, 77 were awarded to females against 150 to males, and 85 to companies (July 2004).

Strategic Planning through a Gender Lens

In 1997, a separate Gender Equality Programme was established within the Secretariat's third Three-Year Strategic Plan. Leading work by a dedicated Gender Section has been vital to ensure that the Secretariat continues to build and strengthen its commitment to gender equality, and that gender mainstreaming is advanced in core political, legal and socio-economic development programme areas.

The promotion of 'development with a gender lens' reinforces the overarching and cross-cutting importance of gender equality within all programme activities. It has had a positive impact on the activities and achievements of the Secretariat where gender equality has been accorded higher priority in its governing and planning bodies, strategic planning and ministerial meetings. The Gender Equality Programme has become

Chart 2.3: Gender Distribution by Grade in the Secretariat (October 2003)



Note: SG = Secretary-General; CS1 = Deputy Secretaries-General; CS2 = Directors; CS3-4 = Special Advisers and Deputy Directors; CS4-6 = Professional Staff; CS7-10 = Support Staff.

a central component of the organisation's work. Its budget allocations since 1996/97 have been 2.1% (1996/97), 1.86% (1998/99), 2.1% (2001/02) and 2.3% (2002/03) of the combined

Commonwealth Secretariat and CFTC budgets.

In 1998, the Gender Steering Committee adopted the Framework for Strategic Actions which was approved by

Table 2.1: Secretariat Staff – Comparative Figures 1999–2003

Year	Female Directors (%)	Female Special Advisers and Deputy-Directors CS2–CS3 (%)	Female Professional Staff CS4–CS6 (%)	Female Support Staff (%)
1999	14.3	25.0	34.1	75.9
2001	27.3	37.9	38.0	76.1
2003	27.0	28.8	40.0	82.7

the Management Committee later that year. These 1998 Strategies, as they became known, institutionalised a gender-sensitive strategic plan across the Secretariat and further stipulated that each programme should develop at least one gender-specific project, in addition to mainstreaming gender in all activities, as appropriate.

The Secretariat has taken a lead in gender mainstreaming by providing gender planning and awareness training across the organisation. Divisions are required to address gender issues in their programme work, including field activities. Guidelines for this were developed and five Gender Mainstreaming Codes introduced to facilitate gender audits and analyses (see

Box 2.7, page 25). Action indicators, and a series of planning briefs and checklists were also developed to help integrate gender into projects.

New Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005–2015

The PoA for the next decade reflects the Commonwealth's principles and values and incorporates its responses to the differential impacts of global changes and challenges on women and men, girls and boys (see *A Decade of Commonwealth Action*, page 6).

The Secretariat will continue to provide critical support to governments in the

implementation of the PoA, policy advice and technical assistance on the application of gender mainstreaming especially gender analysis and planning, and assist in related issues identified by governments. Sector specific strategies and programmes will be developed.

Its future work will seek to promote good governance through public sector reforms and strengthen the capacity of NWMs to mainstream gender equality. The Secretariat and Commonwealth associations will work with other key constituencies, including ministries, local governments, parliamentarians, justice systems, universities, public service training institutions and civil society organisations (CSOs), acting as advocate, broker and catalyst in the promotion of gender equality and mainstreaming.

Partnerships are seen as the most effective way of working towards gender equality. The Secretariat will build on existing partnerships and develop new ones 2005–2015, especially with organisations that have expertise in the four critical areas of the PoA. Regional organisations will be strategic partners in grounding Secretariat work in member

Commonwealth partner organisations met in Fiji Islands in June 2004



countries and within regions.

The Secretariat will endeavour to implement the PoA through strategic interventions and making greater use of ICTs to generate and share knowledge and information, strengthen capacity and institutional development, and improve monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

Building on Achievements

The Secretariat continues to strengthen institutional arrangements and processes that are crucial to the ability of both governments and the Secretariat to advance gender equality. It provides training, advice and technical assistance to member governments in a set of interrelated priority issues of special concern to the Commonwealth and in which it has a comparative advantage. However, the need to improve the low rate of implementation of gender-sensitive programmes is critical for progress and sustainability of results. The uneven progress recorded by member states indicates that urgent action is needed: good practice and success stories should be shared, scarce resources re-allocated and more effective ways of using partnerships sought.

Within the Secretariat, the inclusion of gender perspectives in consensus-building and advocacy work, and in core CFTC activities will enhance gender equality.

End Notes

1 The Commonwealth's areas of comparative advantage respond to its principles and values: democracy and good governance, respect for human rights and rule of law, gender equality, sustainable development, poverty eradication, and HIV/AIDS. It also reflects issues related to least developed countries (LDCs), small states, and common values and similarities in political, administrative, legal, educational and other systems in member countries which facilitates consensus-building and the sharing of experiences, expertise and resources.

2 See The Secretary-General's Reports on the Implementation of the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development: *Learning by Sharing* (2000); *Meeting the New Challenges* (2001); and *Building on Achievements* (2003).

3 At their December 2003 Meeting in Abuja, Commonwealth Heads of Government stated

Box 2.7: Gender Accounting

Gender accounting is central to transparency. It allows the Secretariat to identify and monitor the flow of financial resources to gender mainstreaming and other activities.

In 1997, only 127 project completion reports contained specific reference to gender equality issues, as well as 8 completed evaluations and 2 continuing evaluation studies which were assessed, among other things, for gender equality impacts. Since 1997, there has been a gradual increase in the number and scale of projects classified under the gender codes ranging from 'gender-sensitive' and 'gender-mainstreamed' to 'gender-neutral' or 'unknown' (see tables below).

By February 2004, of a total 515 projects being implemented or completed, at least 72% (370 projects) were gender-coded in some way, 19% (95) as being gender-neutral, and 9% (50) as gender-unknown.

Comparative Gender Review of 199 Secretariat Projects (1999–2001)

Project by Gender Code ¹	Number/Percentage	Value in £ (and percentage)
Gender mainstreamed activities	22 projects (11%)	£2.0 million (21.4%)
Gender-specific	14 projects (7%)	£160,353 (1.7%)
Gender-sensitive	80 projects (40%)	£4.14 million (44.2%)
Gender-neutral	36 projects (18%)	£755,481 (8.0%)
Gender impact unknown	12 projects (6%)	£190,846 (2.0%)
No Gender Code	35 projects (18%)	£2.12 million (22.6%)

Note: An additional 232 projects were not 'gender-coded' as they were implemented before the Gender Mainstreaming Codes were introduced. Closer review showed that a large number of those uncoded activities could have been improved upon from a 'gender dimension' and 'gender outcomes'. (*Commonwealth Secretariat, PIMS Gender Reports, IT Unit, June 2001.*)

Comparative Gender Review of 515 Secretariat Projects (2003/2004)

Project by Gender Code	Number/Percentage	Value in £
Gender mainstreamed activities	111 projects (22%)	£ 2.3 million (26.2%)
Gender-specific	37 projects (7%)	£ 1.4 million (15.6%)
Gender-sensitive	222 projects (43%)	£ 3.8 million (43.3%)
Gender-neutral	95 projects (19%)	£ 0.5 million (5.3%)
Gender impact unknown	50 projects (9%)	£ 0.8 million (9.5%)
No Gender Code	-	-

(*Commonwealth Secretariat, PIMS Gender Reports, IT Unit, February 2004*)

Gender accounting will become more critical in assessing the qualitative and quantitative impacts of mainstream development and democracy programmes undertaken by the Secretariat in the future.

¹ Gender Codes are used to assess the types and number of project activities implemented under the CFTC programme. Their characteristics:

- Gender-specific – The project's primary objective is specific to advance gender equality;
- Gender-mainstreamed – The project takes gender issues into consideration at the design, implementation and evaluation stages;
- Gender-sensitive – Although the primary objective of the project is not specifically gender equality, the project contains a tangible gender component(s)/intervention(s) within it.

their vision: commitment to democracy and a more equitable sharing of the benefits of globalisation; recognition that development and democracy must be mutually reinforcing; making democracy work for pro-poor development and attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

4 Reaffirmed by the 7th Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs (7WAMM) in May/June 2004 in Fiji Islands.